

WHAT ARE MIDDLE-SCHOOL GIRLS LOOKING FOR IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION?

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Many young women become disillusioned with physical education in their high-school years. Mounting evidence suggests that this disillusionment starts in early adolescence. This article discusses the experiences of female students in co-educational, middle-school, physical education classes. Focus group interviews, individual interviews, and questionnaires were used to collect data. The following themes emerged: personal competence, a moving body is a healthy body, choice and variety for a lifetime, and an emerging sense of gender equity. Results provide guidance for the development of physical education curricula to gain and hold the interest of female, middle-school students.

Key words: adolescence, female, curriculum, exercise

Bien des jeunes filles sont désillusionnées quant aux cours d'éducation physique au secondaire. Il y a de plus en plus d'indications que cette désillusion commence au début de l'adolescence. Les auteures présentent les expériences de filles dans les cours d'éducation physique mixtes au secondaire. Les données furent colligées au moyen d'entrevues de groupe, d'entrevues individuelles et de questionnaires. Les thèmes suivants ont surgi : la compétence personnelle, un corps en mouvement est un corps sain, choix et variété tout au long de la vie, émergence d'un sentiment d'égalité entre les sexes. Les résultats permettent d'orienter l'élaboration de programmes d'éducation physique qui sauront capter et maintenir l'intérêt des filles au secondaire.

Mots clés : adolescence, filles, programme d'études, exercice physique

The documented low levels of physical activity among girls and young women in Canada are alarming. The *2000 Physical Activity Monitor* reported that between the ages of 13 and 17 the percentage of females participating in out-of-school physical activity dropped to 30 per cent (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2001). More recently, results of the fourth cycle of the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) survey in Canada showed that an average of only 27 per cent of female youth (grades 6-10) reported they were physically active at least 60 minutes each day for five days in a typical week (Boyce, 2004); Tremblay and Willms (2000) reported that obesity has tripled from 1981-1996 among children and youth aged 7-13. These statistics present a particularly worrisome situation which is further compounded with the evidence that, if females do not have a history of involvement in physical activity during childhood and adolescence, they are significantly less likely to be physically active as adults (Shephard & Trudeau, 2000; Tammelin, Nayha, Hills, & Jarvelin, 2003; Thompson, Humbert, & Mirwald, 2003; Trudeau, Laurencelle, Tremblay, Rajic, & Shephard, 1999; Wallace, 2003).

School physical education has the potential to play an important part in both stemming the decline of physical activity and promoting lifelong physical activity (Stone, McKenzie, Welk, & Booth, 1998; Wechsler, Devereaux, Davis, & Collins, 2000). However, educators struggle with the challenge of providing relevant physical education programs for female students. Indeed, the continuing low enrollment of young women in senior elective, high-school, physical education programs is indicative of this challenge.

When researchers asked older adolescent females (age 15-18) about their physical activity preferences (both within and outside school), physical activity dislikes, and barriers toward participation, four factors consistently emerged. These factors included the need for experiencing fun and enjoyment, a positive social environment that allowed being with friends and protection from harassment, choice and variety of physical activities with an emphasis on individual lifetime activities, and the opportunity to develop meaningful physical skills and personal fitness (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Gibbons, Wharf Higgins, Gaul, & Van Gyn, 1999; Humbert, 1995; Park & Wright, 2000; Schofield, Mummery,

Schofield, & Walmsely, 2002; Sleaf & Wormald, 2001; Wright, 1999). These researchers suggested that the offerings within many high-school, physical education programs do not meet these needs and interests of female students. For example, Flintoff and Scraton (2001) reported that, whereas young women could readily articulate the importance of being physically active, few identified their physical education classes as an avenue to contribute to this outcome. These authors further explained that the young women viewed physical education (PE) as "at best a break from academic work; and at worse, an unnecessary imposition impacting negatively on their academic studies, and one in which they rarely learned new skills useful for their out of school lives" (p. 11).

Some promising research supports the notion that if the needs and interests of young women are incorporated into PE programs, they will willingly participate. For example, in her examination of several senior elective PE programs that successfully achieved a higher than average enrollment of female students, Kilborn (1999) found that these programs incorporated all the factors mentioned earlier. As part of her analysis, Kilborn identified emergent themes, including fairness and equity, meaning and value, and having fun and taking a break. Ennis (1999, 2003) highlighted the importance of the active involvement of students in the curriculum development process as a way to increase their interest, motivation, and commitment. Further to this idea, Gibbons and Gaul (2004) examined the experiences of a group of young women in a senior elective PE course that was specifically designed to meet their needs, interests, and abilities. The students in this course were involved in all phases of course development from the initial planning through to evaluation. Their results underscored the significance female students placed on the opportunity for personal accomplishment. The idea of personal accomplishment portrayed by these students allowed for individual goal setting and assessment techniques. A second theme revealed the importance of a respectful and supportive class atmosphere. Students, feeling that their input was valued, highlighted the respect portion of this theme. Support referred to both the development of friendships among classmates, as well as a lesser emphasis on competition. The third theme was framed by the "desire to have a wide variety of lifetime

physical activities from which to choose, and input into these choices” (p. 10).

Despite these promising actions at the senior elective PE level, considerable evidence indicates that dissatisfaction with physical education among female students starts well before their final high-school years (Biscomb, Matheson, Beckerman, Tungatt, & Jarrett, 2000; Brown, 2000; Fenton, Frisby, & Luke, 1999; Fraser-Thomas & Beaudoin, 2004; Gibbons et al., 1999; Olafson, 2002; Ryan, Fleming, & Maina, 2003). Fenton et al. (1999) found some notable seeds of dissatisfaction with PE started to appear in female students in elementary school. In their examination of the PE experiences of grade-four girls, the authors noted the importance they placed on fun, fairness, and safety. When the girls perceived these aspects were present in PE, they expressed a sense of enjoyment with PE classes, when absent, a strong expression of dislike. As well, another theme focused on the perception of a power imbalance between these female students and their male classmates. The girls expressed frustration with the aggressive behaviour of the boys, dominance during game play, and teachers’ apparent favouritism toward the physical activity preferences of the boys. Girls as young as 9 or 10 years of age are beginning to develop some very strong opinions that may affect their decision to participate in physical education classes in their adolescent years.

Olafson (2002) examined reasons girls in grades seven and eight gave to explain their resistance toward PE classes. Two major themes emerged from the data: Looking Good/Being Popular and Institutional Barriers. The first theme highlighted the pressure the girls felt to be popular and look good. These pressures seemed to be heightened in PE by the comparisons teachers make between the girls and their male classmates, as well as the very public participation required in PE classes. The “Institutional Barriers” theme underscored the dislike girls had for both the structure and content of their PE program. Their PE program was described as a multi-activity curriculum, namely a series of short units, comprised of primarily team sports. Coupled with the constant comparison to the boys, this program left the girls feeling incompetent and weak. Olafson suggested several actions to address the resistance the girls displayed including having them more involved in

the choice of activities included in the PE program, as well as the use of more learner-centred teaching strategies. Several authors shared promising results in their examination of initiatives that focused on implementation of strategies designed to better meet the needs of students in junior-high physical education. For example, Fraser-Thomas and Beaudoin (2004) studied the experiences of female students in junior-high school (grades 7 to 9) when a new provincial PE curriculum was being implemented. The new curriculum included an increase in the range of physical activities, specifically the fitness-based activities (e.g., aquatics, skating, cycling) that female students have often identified among their favourite types of activities. The girls responded positively to this change. However, change in activities alone was not sufficient. The classroom environment also played a prominent part in the physical education experiences of the female students. According to the authors, "girls had less opportunity to participate, they were often victims of boys' derogatory remarks, they felt insecure, and they felt watched and judged by boys" (p. 51). Brown (2000) made similar comments about the implementation of the new junior-high PE curriculum in New Zealand schools. Whereas the new curriculum allowed for more choice in both content and teaching strategies, it appeared that teachers at the local level by no means automatically adopted these changes. She emphasized the need for the support of teachers throughout the curriculum implementation process. More recently, Felton et al. (2005) and Pate et al. (2005) both reported positive results from their examination of the Coordinated School Health Program (CSHP) to increase the physical activity of girls. The physical education component of the program included the implementation of "girl-friendly PE." Girl-friendly PE was defined as having the following seven attributes:

- (1) Gender separation opportunities exist in classes.
- (2) Students are physically active in PE classes.
- (3) Noncompetitive activities are offered.
- (4) Lifelong physical activity is emphasized.
- (5) Classes are fun & enjoyable.
- (6) Appropriate instructional methods are used (e.g., small group interaction).
- (7) Behaviour skills for PE are taught. (Felton et al., 2005, p. 58)

The authors reported a very positive response by the girls to this course.

Female students are developing their attitudes toward physical education well before their final years of high school. If female students do not find value in their junior-high PE programs, it is very unlikely that they will choose to continue when given the choice. In Canada, the majority of young women do not enroll in physical education classes once they become an elective course in high school (Friedman, 2002; Gibbons et al., 1999; Humbert, 1995). From a more positive perspective, several of the preceding authors (e.g., Felton et al., 2005; Fraser-Thomas & Beaudoin, 2004; Gibbons & Gaul, 2004; Pate et al., 2005) provide support for a proactive approach to program development that addresses possible concerns and has the potential to keep female students involved in physical education. It follows that the earlier teachers can meet the needs of female students in their PE classes, the more likely they will want to continue the experience. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to examine the PE experiences of female students in the earliest part of their adolescence (grades 6 and 7, middle school). The study had the following objectives: identification of physical activity preferences and patterns of early adolescent females (both curricular and extra curricular); identification of barriers toward participation in physical education; examination of early adolescent females' knowledge and perceptions of the contribution of physical activity to health.

METHOD

Participants

Ninety girls in grades 6 and 7, enrolled in coeducational compulsory physical education classes in five middle schools in a western Canadian city, volunteered to participate in this study. The participants represented diverse levels of experience, interest, and achievement in physical education. All participants and parents completed an informed consent form prior to the initiation of the study. Following a maximum variation sampling strategy (Patton, 2002), schools differed in size, socio-economic status, and ethnic composition. The office of research administration at the affiliated university granted human ethics approval for this research.

Data Collection

Three ethnographic techniques including semi-structured focus group interviews, one-on-one interviews, and written questionnaires were used to collect data in this investigation. Patton (2002) recommends the collection of data from multiple sources to improve the trustworthiness and authenticity of the data. Similarly, Creswell (1998) defines triangulation as “corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (p. 202). Collecting data from these three sources afforded the participants several different ways to tell about their experiences and facilitated triangulation of the data. Each participant completed one of these three techniques. Selected from the list of students who returned their completed consent forms, participants were randomly assigned to one of the techniques.

Focus group interviews. Semi-structured focus group interviews were chosen to gain insight into the experiences in and perceptions of physical education classes by early adolescent females and their knowledge of the contribution of physical activity to health. Five focus group interviews (6 students in each) were held, one at each of the five middle schools. The interviews were approximately one hour in length, conducted over the school lunch hour. Lunch was provided for the participants. Interviews were completed in a two-week period midway through the school year. Sample questions and probes for focus groups are shown in Table 1.

One-on-one interviews. Ten one-on-one interviews were conducted (two students from each of the five middle schools). This technique allowed students to reflect upon the questions without possible influence from peers. The same focus group questions were used for these interviews. These interviews occurred at the same time as the focus group interviews. All focus groups and one-on-one interviews were audio taped.

Written questionnaires. Participants responded in written form to questions used in the interviews (see Table 1). Fifty students (10 from each of the 5 middle schools) completed the written questionnaire.

Table 1: Sample Questions and Probes for Interviews and Questionnaires

1. We would like to know your thoughts on health, fitness and physical activity in your life.
 - What does health mean to you? What does fitness mean to you?
 - Is health and fitness the same thing?
 - What does being healthy and fit mean to you in terms of what you do every day?
 - What does the phrase "eating right" mean to you?
 2. We would like to hear about your thoughts on physical activity both in and out of school.
 - What kind of physical activity do you like to do/not like to do?
 - How do these activities make you feel?
 - What about your life encourages/discourages you to be physically active?
 3. We would like to know your thoughts and ideas about PE 6 & 7 – what's good, not so good, what changes you would make if you were in charge and if it is an important subject to you and in your school. Think specifically about PE in your own school.
 - If you had the choice to take PE or not take PE in school, which choice would you make?
 - What would you keep the same/change about PE?
 - Should PE be a required for all students? Every day?
 4. If you were responsible for teaching middle school PE, the top 5 things you would do to encourage girls' participation in PE would be ...
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Data Analysis

Content analysis was conducted on the data collected for this study, a strategy that allows a researcher to identify core meanings in large amounts of data (Patton, 2002). In the determination of core meanings, a researcher looks for preliminary patterns in the data. To provide mean-

ing to these patterns, researchers further defined them into more comprehensive and distinct themes.

Audiotapes and questionnaire responses were transcribed. Transcripts were returned to participants for verification. Following verification, the transcripts from the three data sources were analyzed for content and theme. NUD*IST qualitative software served as the data management and analysis tool, a program designed to manage, organize, code, and retrieve data.

The analysis began with pattern coding and classifying each data source independently (Morse, 1994). Because multiple data sources were employed, data source triangulation was used to examine the consistency of patterns across the data sources. This procedure allowed for the tracing of each coded item back to its original data source to determine whether patterns and themes emerged across the three data sources. As patterns and themes emerged, each one was revisited several times to make connections between them (Morse, 1994). The project researchers and a research assistant were involved in the preceding analysis. To further enhance the credibility of the findings, an individual not directly associated with the project, but knowledgeable in the area of the female student experience in PE, made an independent review of the transcripts from the data sources, coding procedures, and the resulting patterns and themes. Four distinct themes emerged from the one-on-one interviews, questionnaires, and focus group interviews.

RESULTS

Each of the four themes identifies notable aspects of the experiences of female students in middle-school physical education.

Theme 1: Variety and Choice for a Lifetime

"We do things I hate in PE . . . I do things I like after school and weekends . . . like dance and judo."

Participants' desire to have a wide variety of physical activities from which to choose, and input into these choices framed this theme. This theme figured prominently in the data. There was a palpable level of

dissatisfaction with the offerings in PE combined with a desire to increase the range of physical activities, as noted in comments such as

I dream about doing hip hop . . .

I like walking and looking around . . . we never get to just walk in PE.

I don't mind doing basketball and volleyball SOMETIMES, but we seem to always do way more of this than other things . . . we did gymnastics for like one day and basketball for way more time. If I like gymnastics it is just too bad for me I guess.

My favourite time in PE was one time when a student teacher did something different . . . it was a fun thing where we had to work as a team . . . kinda like "survivor."

Some of these girls had already developed a sense of resignation with the existing content in their PE classes. This attitude was evident in the following comments:

Basketball, volleyball, soccer and stupid dodge ball, that's all we do in PE.

The teacher tells us what we should be interested in doing . . . not what we really want.

It seems that the things we do in PE are the favourites of only a few of us . . . mostly the ones who play a lot of sports already.

Well, I guess we play basketball so much because that is what the gym is built for . . . the teachers would probably get in trouble if they didn't use the hoops for something.

Several of these middle-school girls were already starting to mention their interest in doing what they referred to as lifetime physical activities. For example, one girl stated emphatically, "I don't like basketball now, I'm not going to like it when I'm old, so why can't I do something I might do when I'm old like swimming or aerobics?" Another student explained that she went to exercise class after school with her mom and wondered why the same activity was not included in her PE class. The girls were most appreciative when their teachers included lifetime physical activities. The following comments are representative of this sense of appreciation:

One time we got to do yoga, I loved it.

My favourite time was when we went to the fitness place and used the treadmills. I really liked that and have gone there again on the weekend.

One time in PE we walked to the beach and back and counted our steps, I liked this way better than playing some stupid game.

Theme 2: Personal Competence

"I hate playing soccer when everybody else is way better than me . . . especially when I don't get to learn how . . ."

The notion of personal competence highlighted the importance of the students feeling a sense of efficacy in their skills. This was evident in the following comments:

I feel good when I'm good enough.

We hardly ever do anything in PE that I'm good at.

I wish we could practice a skill 'til we got it . . . I never have enough time.

Sufficient opportunity to practise fair evaluation procedures was tied to the notion of competence by emphasizing perceived inequity between different students. One student contended that she "felt encouraged when she could perform a skill like the teacher wanted" and felt frustrated when compared to classmates who "played on the basketball team and had way more practice than what we got in PE." Another student provided the following example: "I'm really good at figure skating, but it doesn't matter in PE 'cause we never get to go skating. We get tested only on the things that are important like BASKETBALL . . . who decided that is the most important?"

Several students commented specifically on the lack of time between being introduced to a new skill and subsequently being evaluated on that same skill.

I wish we would get time to practice how to do things . . . the teacher shows us something then ta-da we are supposed to be able to do it.

One day our teacher showed us how to do a shot, and the next class we got tested! We didn't even get to practice it . . . how unfair is that?

The public nature of the PE environment also played into the impact of personal competence on one's comfort level. This feeling was evident in the following examples:

It is such a great feeling to not have to worry about knowing how to do something . . . especially when I have to do it in front of my friends.

I sometimes feel sick when I have to do something in front of everybody, especially when I know I'm not very good . . . I wish we could have more practice before we have to show it.

I don't worry if I'm good at it, but if I'm not, it's gross.

Theme 3: A Healthy Body Is a Moving Body

"I know that being skinny is not the same as being healthy."

Theme 3 revealed that many of these middle-school girls had at least a basic understanding of the importance of being physically active and its contribution to overall health.

I KNOW physical activity is a GOOD thing to do . . . and will make me healthier.

Being healthy means not being sick and being able to do exercise without it feeling gross.

I feel healthier when I exercise.

As well, it was evident that the students had received information about healthy eating and physical activity. However, in some instances, their comments in this area had a somewhat cynical tone: "Obesity, obesity, obesity . . . we keep hearing about it." "My dad tells me that exercise is good for me, but he doesn't do it."

One student commented that "I get it about not eating too much junk food, but it bugs me to get forced into it, sometimes I buy chips just to protest!" Another student provided the following example: "Our school has no junk food so I walk to the corner store at lunch to get some, so I get my junk food fix and exercise at the same time! Hah!" Interestingly, there was a notable absence of comments that made reference to

body image concerns (e.g., weight or appearance) or the use of physical activity for weight control.

Theme 4: Emerging Sense of Gender Equity

"In PE it seems that the teacher chooses what the boys want to do and not what we want to do."

There was a clear and strong sentiment throughout the data that highlighted the girls' perception that their teachers attended more closely to the needs and interests of their male counterparts. As one student noted, "Our teacher ALWAYS chooses things the boys are good at doing." In addition to their perception that their teachers chose to do the activities that were of more interest to the boys, the girls also noted that the negative behaviour of the boys would sometimes prevent the teachers from offering a wider range of physical activities. The following comments are representative of this concern:

When we do something the boys don't like (e.g., dance) they fool around until the teacher gives up . . . when we say we hate something, we have to do it anyway.

A couple of times our teacher let us vote for what we wanted to do in PE . . . one time, even though we had more votes, the boys refused to do it and the teacher let them go play on their own. Another time, when the boys won, we HAD to do their choice, I guess we have to be jerks like the boys then the teacher will let us go do our thing like she did with the boys.

The girls also commented on their perception of unfair treatment in their physical activities preferences outside of physical education class. "When we asked to have a dance club, the teacher said, 'No, 'cause the boy's basketball team uses the gym' . . . like who says boys' basketball is more important?" As well, the girls commented on how the boys' behaviour negatively impacted their overall comfort level in class. Comments about feeling ridiculed, harassed, and intimidated were frequent. Several girls stated that when they told their teacher about the boys' behaviour, they were told to "just ignore the boys." One girl stated

bitterly, "The teacher just let the boys hassle us, and made fun of us when we got mad at the boys." She went on further to say, "The teacher didn't seem to even notice the girls didn't like it."

Although on one hand the girls mentioned how they did not like the behaviour of the boys, few said they wanted to be in separate PE classes. The response was more often that the girls wanted to "show the boys" that they could do as well as them.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the PE experiences of female students in the earliest part of their adolescence (grades 6 and 7). The focus group interviews together with the one-on-one interviews and written questionnaires gave us a rich resource to understand participant's needs, interests, and preferences. Our findings backed up much of the previous research on the factors that contribute to girls and young women either embracing or resisting involvement in their physical education classes. In particular the seven characteristics of girl-friendly PE offered by Felton et al. (2005), as listed earlier in this article, are all evident throughout the four themes in our study. Theme 1: "Variety and Choice for a Lifetime" represents one of the most predominant concepts throughout much of the research in this field. Like their older counterparts, the middle school girls in our study wanted a wider variety of physical activity offerings in their PE programs including lifetime activities such as walking, dance, or swimming. The girls who participated in this study disliked the predominance of team sports, frequently stating that such activities had little relevance to their current or future lifestyles. Although recent revisions of many provincial PE curriculum guides for grades K-12 include the suggestion that a wider range of physical activities be offered to all students, Brown (2000) and Fraser-Thomas and Beaudoin (2004) caution educators that a recommendation in a curriculum guide does not automatically translate into change in practice. This change "on paper" must be accompanied with professional development support for teachers and necessary financial resources (e.g., equipment, facilities) if it is to succeed. The importance of this theme cannot be underestimated. We are confident that expanding the variety of physical activities to include more lifetime activities in middle-school physical

education will have a positive impact on female students similar to the findings of Felton et al. (2005), Pate et al. (2005), and Stanne (2005) in junior-high PE courses, and Gibbons and Gaul (2004) in senior PE courses. The need for "Personal Competence" in physical skill performance noted in Theme 2 also provides important information to educators. Regardless of the physical activity, the girls undoubtedly wanted to develop their skills and felt inadequate and uncomfortable when they were compared to more skilled classmates. A key determinant in the adoption and maintenance of a physically active lifestyle is feelings of physical competence and confidence. Too often girls and young women do not feel physically competent because they lack the fundamental skills needed to participate in an array of physical activity opportunities. Attention to adequate practice time, teaching strategies that allow for sound progressions, and interesting practice tasks increase the likelihood that time spent in PE will result in improvement of skill, and ultimately more enjoyment.

We were somewhat heartened by the middle school girls' knowledge of the relationship between physical activity and health as noted in Theme 3: "A Healthy Body is a Moving Body." However, the noticeable cynical tone in some of their comments may suggest that how the information is being presented to them may not be as meaningful as it might be. In other words, the girls may know that regular physical activity contributes to health, but may not use this knowledge to guide their own behaviour in a positive direction. The comprehensive school health model, where PE is part of an integrated approach toward health and physical activity, has shown considerable potential to increase the relevance of this information for female students (Felton et al., 2005; Pate et al., 2005). This multi-pronged approach appears to provide students with more diverse sources of accurate information with less dependence on PE as the sole source.

Finally, Theme 4: "Emerging Sense of Gender Equity" reminds physical educators that the impact of student behaviour in the learning environment cannot be underestimated. It was evident that these middle-school girls had already experienced numerous instances of harassment and intimidation by their male classmates. This accusation is particularly troubling because the girls described fairly frequent occur-

rences of these types of incidents. Unfortunately, this type of behaviour is not unique to middle school. Fenton et al. (1999) found evidence of aggressive and dominating behaviour by boys in elementary-school physical education. Gibbons et al. (1999) and Humbert (1995) identified similar issues in their studies of the PE experiences of older female adolescents. Even more troubling was the comment by one middle-school girl that her teacher appeared to do little to deal with the behaviour of the boys. This theme reminds physical educators that it is the teacher's responsibility to establish and maintain a positive classroom. Although we mentioned earlier that providing variety in PE course offerings is of paramount importance, the nature of the environment in which the girls are learning appears to have as much impact on their experience as the physical activity in which they are participating. This factor also calls attention to the necessity of including gender equitable teaching strategies as a regular part of both preservice and in-service teacher education.

In conclusion, the four themes in our study are consistent with Gibbons and Blacklock's (1998) suggestion that if female students are to have a positive experience in PE, they must have a safe environment in which they are valued by both the teacher and classmates and allowed to participate in meaningful physical activities. Most notably, we found that many of the issues researchers have linked to older adolescent females in junior-high and senior-high school are already appearing in the comments of girls in grades 6 and 7.

The role that school-based physical education programs can play in the development of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to be active for a lifetime is well documented (Mandigo, 2004; McGraw et al., 2000; Mendlein, Baranowski & Pratt 2000; Sallis & McKenzie 1991; Tremblay, 1998). If physical educators are to play a role in enhancing the health of girls and young women, their efforts need to be directed towards improving middle-years physical education programs. It is very evident that girls in middle school know what types of experiences they desire in their physical education classes. The challenge, therefore, is to develop and teach courses to meet the needs of middle-school girls and to help them see that physical activity is an essential part of their life. It is clearly not sufficient to wait until female students are choosing to walk

away from senior elective PE programs before physical educators design relevant and enjoyable courses.

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